Using Theatre and Improv to Enhance Dental Education

Hartley Jafine

How the Theatre and Improv Can Be Useful to Healthcare Professionals

- Research shows that students who engage with a humanities experience are more comfortable with ambiguity and uncertainty, stronger communicators and collaborators, and can better understand the perspective of another.
- Theatre is a way to improve communication and collaboration within a team. It is a fun way to engage with play and can be very valuable in building team cohesion and wellness.
- Theatre skills are life skills.
- Every skill required to be a good performer on stage is a skill that can be applied to any profession:
    - Spontaneity
    - Adaptability
    - Flexibility
    - How to communicate with others
    - How to understand the character you are portraying
- These skills can translate to dentistry and healthcare education as a way to improve and enhance clinical competencies.
- Most of what we do every day is a form of improv. Rarely do we interact with someone and know what they are going to say and what we are going to say in response. We adapt and are spontaneous based on what the other person is sharing.
- The dentist/patient encounter is no exception to this. It requires two people (actors) to gather information, listen and respond, often while under considerable stress.
- It comes down to how we read the situation, respond, and perform in a way that the other person can feel heard and understood.

The Importance of Listening

- Listening is a skill that most people think they do well, though many of us listen to respond rather than to hear what the other person has to say.
- Through listening carefully, both verbally and non-verbally, we can learn a lot about another person’s perspective - what they’re saying and what they’re not saying.

Teaching People to Listen Better

- Part of the value of engaging with theatre and improv is that it is experiential and immersive.
- It allows learners to engage with an experience and then reflect on how it went.
- There is opportunity for participants to reflect on how they listened in any given encounter, and to consider how they can improve to enhance the next encounter.

Resources

- King's College London website on clinical humanities